

THE FLIGHT TO ZOAR

NO. 2642

A SERMON

INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, OCTOBER 1, 1899

DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON

AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK
ON A LORD'S-DAY EVENING, IN THE AUTUMN OF 1857

“The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar.”
Genesis 19:23

THE destruction of Sodom was, undoubtedly, a literal fact. And the record of it in Genesis is as true a piece of history as any event that is recorded by Tacitus or Josephus. But it was also intended to be a great parabolic lesson to us—a lesson in the shape of a parable, by which we might receive both instruction and blessing.

The Old Testament is a great Book of texts and the New Testament contains the sermons upon them. Lot's wife was in the Old Testament as a text and in the New Testament we have the sermon upon it, “Remember Lot's wife.” And wherever, my brethren, I find our Lord Jesus Christ, or any of His apostles, referring to an incident in the Old Testament, I always think it is our business to look at that event to which they refer.

In the writings of the old Puritans, which I delight to read, I often find in the margin a hand pointing to some special words, which it is requisite that the reader should particularly remark and read with care. And when I see the hand put opposite the passage, by some old lover of the truth, who, in days of yore, read the book, I generally turn to it with eagerness, to see what is the gem pointed at by the finger.

Now, I think, when our Savior said, “Remember Lot's wife,” He did, as it were, put a hand on the margin of the Bible, pointing to the whole incident describing the destruction of Sodom. He did, in effect, say, “Mark that event. Look at it closely, for there is more in it than there seems to be.” And as there is something instructive in Lot's wife becoming a pillar of salt, there is something to be learned from every step of Lot's journey—and from every incident connected with it.

If it be so, I shall not be regarded as being whimsical and fanciful if I assert that, in this text, I believe there is much instruction in the simple incident recorded here—“The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar.”

I will soon map out my sermon. *Lot was nearly in the dark till he reached Zoar*—that is the first head. Secondly, *the sun was risen upon the earth as soon as Lot was in Zoar*. Thirdly, *the same moment which saw the sun rise on Lot, saw the fiery hail fall on Sodom*. We have here three facts which I think are three pictures, illustrating three great truths with regard to the sinner's experience.

I. First, then, LOT WAS NEARLY IN THE DARK ALL THE ROAD HE RAN TILL HE REACHED ZOAR.

Mark, when he first started, the Scripture tells us, in the fifteenth verse, that the morning rose—there was the first grey dawn when the angels hastened him out of Sodom. It was just the breaking of the day and it is said that as soon as Lot entered into Zoar, the sun was thoroughly risen, but not till then. He had to find his way through shadows and run, to a great degree, in the dark.

Ah, my friends, that was a solemn moment when those notable guests turned their host out of doors and did it all out of love and kindness, too. When the two angels took Lot, and his wife, and his daughters, by the hand, and dragged them forth, and bade them run! It was a solemn moment when the heavens were heavy with God's wrath and only waited until Lot was safely housed to burst in impetuous torrents upon the devoted cities.

Do you not see them, or, rather, do you not fancy you can see their black figures in the gloom of the twilight? You scarcely understand what it can be—there are two men pushing forth a family into the street. You see them next grasping their hands and with loving haste driving them forward. You now hear a voice, something more than earthly, speaking in the celestial language, crying, “Escape for thy life!”

And now mark the man, and his wife, and his daughters fleeing away—fleeing from their own house—fleeing from their own kinsmen and acquaintances! A woman leaving her own sons-in-law and wives leaving their own husbands to perish in the city! Watch their flight! See them as they flee across the plain—they stumble full often, for the way is not clear before them—and they little know where they are going. They only see the dark shadow of the mountain looming in the distance and they run thither with all their might in the darkness.

Now, Lot running in the dark is *the picture of a poor sinner when he comes out of Sodom*. You who have just been awakened and convinced of sin, must not expect that you will have the sunlight of God’s favor all at once. There must first come into your house the angel of conviction, to thrust you out of your abode of ruin.

After you have run a while, you will then have sunlight, and joy, and peace. But in your running, whilst you are seeking the Savior, you must expect to run in the darkness—and if you expect it, you will not be disappointed. Oh, how dark it is to a poor sinner when he is first brought to know his state by nature, before the blessed remedy of grace has been applied to him by the Holy Spirit!

Look at him—tears follow each other down his cheeks in one perpetual race. He weeps almost all day and all night. And if he rests for a while for very sorrow, his dreams disturb him—he is always miserable—men call him mad, for he is as one demented. He talks to himself in doleful language and as he goes about his business, he moans and sighs, “Oh, that!” And “Ah!” And “Would that!” monosyllables that no man understands, but which are well-known in their inward meaning both to God and to his own heart. He has no ray of hope, he believes he is shut out from God forever, and he thinks that God is just in having hidden the light of His countenance from him.

He does not murmur against the Most High, but never was man so near to complaining as he is. He is ready to lay violent hands on himself, for he says he cannot bear his existence. He cries with David, “I am weary with my groaning; all the night I make my bed swim; I water my couch with my tears.” “Day and night thy hand is heavy upon me.”

He turns to the Book of Job and he reads the patriarch’s doleful cries and declares that he could say the same. And all the mournful words of David or Jeremiah he applies to himself. “I watch, and am as a sparrow alone upon the house-top,” says he. “I am like a pelican of the wilderness. I am like an owl of the desert. I have no comfort, no peace, no joy. God’s mercy is clean gone from me forever, He will be mindful of me no more!”

Now, dear friends, please recollect that, to a greater or lesser degree, this always is, and always must be, the condition of a sinner when he is seeking the Savior. O you who are in the dark, remember that you are only where thousands of others have been! Think it not a strange thing that you are subject to this eclipse—others have been eclipsed, too—and all those who have found the Sun of righteousness have had to run through the dark to get at Him. There must be a dark tunnel before we can get at Christ and we must grope through worse than Egyptian night before we behold the face of God with joy.

Perhaps I may be asked what it is that makes it so dark to a poor sinner whilst he is seeking Christ. I think I may tell you, very briefly, it is *partly his own ignorance*. Poor soul, he does not know enough about the Savior, nor enough about the plan of salvation, to cheer him. Very likely he has never heard the way of salvation preached in all his life.

That may be true and yet he may have attended a chapel—as chapels go in these times—for many a year. He does not understand the simple A B C of the Gospel, the sinner’s sinnership the only argument to prove that he has an interest in Christ’s salvation. He does not understand the atonement—he cannot make it out how God can be just and yet pardon such a wretch as he is.

All this ignorance necessarily causes darkness. And mark you, that mistakes concerning the Gospel are never little things—they are always dangerous, they are always painful. Sinners have more griefs than they need have, because they have less knowledge than they should have.

Sometimes, too, this darkness arises *from mistakes concerning the Gospel*. There is not so much ignorance as there is error with regard to it—by which word, I mean, not a mistake willfully committed, but a mistake ignorantly committed. I know some people who understand the theory of salvation quite well, but they have a mistaken idea as to its application, or else, perhaps, they read it the wrong way upwards. I know many who do not neglect the Scriptures, but they begin reading about election and predestination before they know anything of conviction. So, often, the darkness of the sinner arises from misapprehension concerning the Gospel.

Many a time, too, the poor soul is running after Christ in the dark, *because he has got legal ideas in his head*. That Mr. Legality is the ruin of many, and after all we do and say to him, he still lives on. You know how Martin Luther said that he preached justification by faith every day, because he found that the people forgot it every day.

In one of his quaint sermons, he says, “I feel as if I could take my book and beat this doctrine into your heads, because you will never remember that you are not saved by your own good works, but by the righteousness of Christ.” A sinner may be told, as plainly as possible, that all he can do is less than nothing—that salvation is all of grace from first to last—but that crafty old devil will not let him believe it. He will always lead him to think that he must do something, or be something, or feel something before he can take Jesus Christ to be his All-in-all. And so legality, like a black dragon, spreads its wings between the soul and God’s light and shuts out every ray of comfort from the poor desponding spirit.

Moreover, *this darkness is caused principally by conscience and by Satan*. It is a strange thing, but sometimes, a sinner’s conscience and the devil will strike hands. When Mr. Conscience is blowing his dreadful trumpet and startling the sleepy sinner, he is doing good service. But sometimes, after the sinner is thoroughly aroused, the devil comes and whispers to Mr. Conscience—and in such a voice that it seems as if an angel said it—“Blow on, Mr. Conscience. Blow a more dreadful blast still and I will help you.”

And the devil comes in, and with his awful yellings he makes a thousand times worse noise than even conscience does—and the poor soul is bewildered, terror-stricken, and well-nigh driven mad. “Oh!” cries Satan, “you have been a sinner beyond the reach of Christ’s mercy.” “Yes,” says conscience, “that you have!” “Oh!” says the devil, “you have committed every crime that flesh can commit.” “Yes,” says conscience, “that’s true!” And he echoes every word that Satan says.

In comes the devil, and says, “You have committed the unpardonable sin.” “No doubt,” says conscience, “I always told you so.” “And now,” says Satan, “there is no hope for you—you must be cast away forever.” “Yes,” says conscience, “you must be cast away forever. There is no way of escape for such a wretch as you are.”

And when conscience and the devil get blowing the same trumpet, it is a dreadful noise, indeed. And there is not a soul in the world that can endure its life when both Satan and conscience are making such a furious noise. No wonder, my dear friends, it should be dark with the sinner when he is running on the road to heaven. No wonder that, before he finds the Savior, there should be a doleful cry in his ears, if Satan and conscience are both assailing him.

I know that I do not like my conscience to be against me, even without the devil. Conscience, when he is noisy, is not a very comfortable housemate—certainly, we would rather have him still and quiet than always thundering in our ears. But when hell and conscience go together, I say again, there is no soul that can long bear its existence, except God, in sovereign mercy, shall either support the soul or put a speedy stop to the noise.

Perhaps you ask me, “Why does not the poor sinner look to Jesus?” Ah! that is the very point of his difficulty. He does not look to Jesus because he does not think that Jesus Christ died for such a wretch as

he is. You know, it is one thing for you to talk about a sinner looking to Jesus when he is in the dark, and quite another thing to do it when you are in the dark yourself. It is a blessed thing when the Lord enables a poor sinner to turn his eyes to Calvary and see the brightness of Jesus.

But there are, often, long days and dreary nights before the sinner learns his own sinfulness and is enabled to look to the Savior. “But” says one, “why does he not go hear a good minister preach? Surely that would help him out of his trouble.” My dear friends, we try to preach the Gospel as plainly as we can, but it does seem that we only rivet the chains on some people.

There is a poor soul in this place now—I have talked with her many times, I know her sad condition, and I have often shaped my discourse so as to meet her case. Many times I have thought that the Lord has given me some sweet word that would break the gates of brass and set the imprisoned one at liberty. It has taken a little of the pride out of me and shown me how impossible it is for man, when he labors the hardest, to bring a soul out of bondage before the Lord’s promised hour of redemption comes.

“But” says one, “why do they not turn to the Bible and lay hold on some precious truth there? I do so and find comfort from it.” Yes, my dear friends, and they do turn to the Bible just as you do, yet they find no comfort, for they cannot lay hold on the promises. I know, when I was for many a month in bondage, I used to read the Bible through—and the threatenings were all printed in capitals, but the promises were in such small type that, for a long time, I could not make them out. And when I did make them out, I did not believe they were mine. But the threatenings were all my own.

“There,” said I, “when it says, ‘He that believeth not shall be damned,’ that means me.” When I read, concerning Christ, “He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him,” then I thought I was shut out. When I read, “He found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears,” “Ah!” thought I, “that is myself again.”

And when I read, “That which beareth thorns and briers is rejected and is nigh unto cursing,” “Ah!” I said, “that describes me to the last iota.” And when I heard the Master say, “Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?” “Ah!” thought I, “that is my text—He will have me down before very long and not let me cumber the ground any more.”

But when I read, “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters,” I said, “That does not belong to me, I am sure.” And when I read, “Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden,” “No,” I said, “that belongs to my brother, to my sister,” or those I knew round about me, for they were laboring and heavy laden, I thought, but I was not.

And though, God knows, I would weep and cry, and lament till my heart was breaking within me, if any man had asked me whether I sorrowed for sin, I would have told him “No, I never had any true sorrow for sin” “Well, do you not feel the burden of sin?” “No.” “But you really are a convinced sinner?” “No,” I would have said, “I am not.”

Is it not strange that poor sinners, when they are coming to Christ, are so much in the dark that they cannot see their own hands? They are so much in the dark that they cannot see themselves. And though God has been pleased to work the good work in them, and give them godly fear and a tender conscience, they will stand up and declare that they have neither of those blessings, that in them there is not any good thing and that God has not looked on them nor loved them.

But strange as this is, that is how souls go to Christ. They are like Lot going to Zoar—they are all in the dark and can see nothing until they come to the Savior.

II. Now think of the second fact. NO SOONER WAS LOT IN ZOAR THAN THE SUN WAS UP.

Once he was inside the gate of that little city, the sun shone forth in all its brightness. I daresay Lot thought, “Well, I wish it had risen a little earlier. Oh, how pleased I should have been if I had had a little of that light while running across the plain!” So, when we are brought to the Lord Jesus, we often say, “I wish I had had a little of this peace when I was in bondage. Oh, if I could have had one cupful of this river of joy I am now drinking, when I was so thirsty, what a blessing it would have been!”

But God knows best. Depend upon it, my brethren—if one ray of sunlight more had been good for Lot, he would have had it. And if, poor tried sinner, one gleam of comfort more than you now have,

would be good for you, God would not deny it to you. But He keeps you in the dark for your good, as He shall ultimately bring you into the light for your good.

Lot, when he reached Zoar, had the sunlight. And *when the sinner gets to Christ, then he gets sunlight, too*. When the poor soul is widowed of all its hopes and bereaved of all its trust, when it is reduced to beggary and in a penniless condition, when it has its feet cut from under it and its hands shot away, when it has nothing left to call its own, but is reduced to death's door, in the hour of its extremity, then is God's gracious opportunity.

Then, when the spirit casts itself wholly, without reserve, upon the blood and righteousness of Jesus, and puts implicit trust in Him, who lived and died to work, and weave, and spin, and dye a righteousness for poor sinners—I say then, for the first moment, the sinner gets joy in his heart. Do not expect, my dear hearers, that you will ever get any comfort whilst you are running anywhere except to Christ. Expect the comfort only when you get to Him. You may have just a gleam or two of light beforehand, as Lot did, but you will not have much more.

And remember, *it is no use your running anywhere except to Christ*, for though you run ever so fast, you will only run into deeper darkness unless you run to Him.

*“The moment a sinner believes,
And trusts in his crucified God,
His pardon at once he receives,
Redemption in full through His blood.”*

That very moment his burden rolls off his shoulders, his chains fall to the earth and he is free. That moment, his sores are all healed, his wounds are all bound up, and his flowing blood is stanchd forever. Have you, dear friend, ever felt that instantaneous change which works such joy as this? If you have, then I am not uttering a strange thing when I say that the sun has risen upon you.

Oh, that moment, when the sinner first starts up, clean rid of guilt on his conscience! I thought I could have leaped from earth to heaven, at one spring, when I first saw my sins drowned in the Redeemer's blood. You know what John Bunyan says—to repeat an often-quoted tale—“I wanted,” he said, “to even tell the crows on the ploughed land what God had done for my soul!”

Did you ever follow a poor simple convert as soon as he knows the Lord? He runs home and calls his neighbors together and says, “I have found the Lord Jesus.” Probably they will begin laughing at him, but he cannot understand what there is to laugh at, for he says, “My Master is a precious and blessed Master—He has taken all my sins away.”

And he will go on telling the simple story till, mayhap, some of them are melted by it, though the rest may scoff. The joy, the gladness, the rhapsody, the exultation, the young heaven begun in the heart of the newborn convert, is the nearest thing to paradise that the earth ever saw. On the day that our sins are pardoned, God sets all the bells of heaven ringing—and then the bells of our heart chime in melody.

On the day when God is pleased to blot out our sins, He hangs every lane and every alley of Mansoul with splendid flags and colors, and gilded lamps and bright jewels. Then He bids sweet music play in every part of the city and He makes the fountains run with wine—and He gives hogsheads of the precious liquid for poor souls to drink of—souls that have been faint and dying and athirst before!

Oh, that marriage day, when the soul is affianced to Christ. That day, when, for the first time, it rides in the chariot of mercy and sits in the same seat with its Well-beloved! Oh! that first hour, when Jesus puts the ring of His eternal love on the finger of our experience and whispers, “Thou art Mine,” and our heart says to Jesus, “I am Yours.”

Oh, that moment! Surely, heaven itself is not happier. All the difference between that moment and heaven is that heaven is a great piece of tapestry and this is one of the threads. “The sun was risen upon the earth when Lot entered into Zoar,” so the light of God's countenance rises upon poor sinners when they come to Jesus.

III. Now, thirdly, we have to consider a sadder fact. GOD CAN DO TWO THINGS AT A TIME.

With His right hand, He wheeled the sun up the steeps of heaven and bade it shine upon Lot, and with the other He opened the batteries of heaven that they might rain their fire and brimstone upon Sodom. Let us remember that *God's two hands are always at work in that way*—from the very beginning, that is always what He has done.

With one hand, He shut Noah in the ark, and with the other He sent forth the floods of the everlasting cisterns and let the fountains of the great deep burst upon the earth. With one hand he smote the Red Sea and bade Israel walk through it dry-shod, and with the other He cast the waters down into their place and drowned Pharaoh and all his hosts therein. And now see Him—with one hand He lights the sun—and with the other hand He darkens Sodom with the smoke of the devouring flames. Ah, friends, remember that this is what shall be done all the story through!

A day is coming when we who, like poor Lot, have been running to heaven in the dark, with many clouds of fear, and much gloom and sorrow, will reach the river of death. And when the Christian comes to die, God the mighty Savior is pleased to take the film from his eyes and enables him to see the angels. He opens wide his eye and bids him behold the glorious city that is built on high and those shining ones that perpetually traverse its streets.

He opens his ear and bids him listen to the hallelujahs of the blessed, and then, sometimes, He catches away his spirit and seems to waft it almost over Jordan, till, before the man dies, he says, “Whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell, God only knoweth, but I have been caught up to the third heaven, and have seen and heard things which mortals cannot utter.” Oh, who can describe the raptures of the dying saint, the glories of that moment when God is pleased to cut the fetters that bind us to our clay, and give us leave to soar into His presence?

But whilst God is doing that with His right hand, what is He doing with His left? He is smoothing the path of His children to the grave, but what is He doing to the wicked? He is not smoothing their path. “Upon the wicked he shall rain snares, fire and brimstone, and a horrible tempest.” When they are dying, He draws no curtains around them, except they be the black curtains of doom.

When they are expiring, no angels attend their deathbed—but grim fiends are waiting there. The left hand of God falls heavily upon the wicked man, and as he is entering the world of spirits, God sometimes gives him a foretaste and prelude of the horrors of hell. His right hand wheels the sun to give light to the Christian and bids him look to heaven—His left hand rains down a tempest on the wicked and bids him dread to die.

And now follow the two spirits out of this world. The vital spark of the Christian has fled.

*“In vain my fancy tries to paint
The moment after death,
The glories that surround the saint,
When yielding up his breath.”*

The right hand of God is under the saint and in love He does embrace him. God upholds His child in the floods. He whispers, “I am with you, Israel, passing through the stream. Be not afraid, underneath you are the everlasting arms.” Hark to the shouts of victory. Mark the calm composure of the countenance and see the joy flashing in the eye! This is what God’s right hand is doing to the righteous.

But what is His left hand doing to the wicked. My dear brethren, I dare not attempt to describe the sinner as he dies. And when he is dead, it were too awful for me to suppose how he feels the moment his spirit is out of his body. Oh, what an awful sensation that must be when the first pang of hell shoots through the soul!

My imagination can just mount to it, but I cannot go further. That man was a blasphemer—how must he feel when he confronts the God whom he blasphemed and stands before the burning eyes of his incensed Creator. Can you imagine that solitary moment—for I should suppose there is but one such—

although eternity is horrible, there can scarcely be more than one moment so new with horror, so dolefully novel with torment, as when the soul is launched upon that everlasting sea, the waves of which are fire, and the depths of which are hell. I cannot tell all that it means. I only know that these are the Lord's own words, "Consider this, you that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there is none to deliver."

And now comes the last great day! The world is standing before God's bar. *See what He is doing with His right hand.* He is beckoning the righteous to glory. He is adorning their heads with crowns that excel the sun in brightness. He is girding their loins with snow-white robes of immaculate purity. He is touching their lips and making them sing like cherubim. He is setting their hearts on fire with the bliss of heaven and kindling their spirits with everlasting glory.

He is lifting them up and making them sit together with Christ, far above all principalities and powers and every name that is named. See how the sun is risen upon them! Describe if you can, or imagine if you dare, the brightness of the sunlight of glory, when it shall dawn upon redeemed man in the day of the final account!

See, it is a sunshine without a cloud. It is a sun without an eclipse! See, see, their happy faces! Hark to their joyous songs!

*"No groans do mingle with the songs
That warble from immortal tongues."*

Words fail me to depict the bright sunlight of the Savior's love as it shines on every happy saint. Thought cannot let me tell the brightness of the glory that shall stream from the brow of the eternal Father when He shall smile upon His well-beloved children. And who can describe the glory of the Sacred Spirit when, in all the riches of His fullness, He shall beam in the eye and heart of every blood-bought soul? This is what God is doing with His right hand—leading all His saints to heaven and setting them upon thrones forever and ever!

And what is He doing with His left hand? Nay, pardon me, excuse me from the task of picturing that dread work of judgment. I might perhaps say things that would be horrible, terrible and doleful—yet, even then, my speech would fall infinitely short of the terrible reality. What is God doing to the wicked? He is unloosing the loins of the mighty and breaking the iron sinews of their necks.

What is God doing to the wicked? He is affrighting them with terror and driving them mad with despair. See them as they fly from His presence. Hark to them as they shriek in their agony. There they go—down, down, down—to the gulf of everlasting woe! What is God doing with His left hand? He is hurling fire upon them. He is launching thunderbolts.

What is He doing? O earth, I see you shaking. O stars, I behold you vanishing from the vault of night! Sun, you are quenched. Moon, you are a clot of blood! I see the heavens bereaven of their light and the glorious Son of God seated on His snow-white throne, and sinners trembling at their everlasting doom.

I see them bite their tongues, that, like firebrands, scorch their mouths. I see them dying, but not dead. Damned, but not annihilated—not ceasing to be—forever bruised beneath the foot of vengeance and yet never crushed out of existence. O my God, no mortal tongue can tell this dreary tale! Had I been dead and passed the burning lake, and smelt the sulfurous flame, then, perhaps, I might have spoken of all these terrible realities, but tonight I cannot speak. Take your Bibles and read of the fire that cannot be quenched, of the worm that dies not, of the pit that is bottomless—and remember that this is what God is doing with His left hand.

The sun had risen upon Zoar and the fire was falling upon Sodom. Ah, sinner, will it not be an awful thing to see the contrast between you and the righteous? If you perish in your ungodly state, it will make your hell more awful when you behold, afar off, the righteous exalted in heaven. Nothing makes the famished man more hungry than to see others feasting when he has nought himself.

O young man, what will it be to see your mother there in heaven and you cast out? O young woman, will you see your companion glorified with Jesus and you cast away with devils? O husband, will you find yourself crying, with Dives, for a drop of water, while your wife is in the presence of Jesus? Ah, son, will you see your parents glorified and you yourself cast out?

Set the two in contrast—look on this picture and on that! God give you grace to bow the knee and “kiss the Son.” And if He has taught you your need of a Savior, may He give you grace to accept the hearty invitation I would tender you in His name, “Come, and welcome, sinner, come.”

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

MATTHEW 24:42-51 AND MATTHEW 25:1-13

Matthew 24:42. *Watch therefore: for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come.*

That He will come is certain. That His coming may be at any moment is equally sure and therefore we ought to always be ready for His appearing. The Lord make us to be so!

43-44. *But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh.*

Perhaps you can imagine how eagerly the householder watches when he expects thieves. Every little sound alarms him. He thinks he hears someone at the door, then he fancies it is someone at the window. But he is on the alert, with eye and ear and his whole being wide awake. So ought we to be with regard to the coming of the Lord, as watchful as if we knew that Christ would come tonight. We do not know that He will come so soon, yet it may be so, “for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of Man cometh.”

45-46. *Who then is a faithful and wise servant, whom his lord hath made ruler over his household, to give them meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing.*

Doing whatever the Master has appointed him to do. If he be a minister, preaching the truth with all his heart. If he be a teacher, endeavoring to feed the minds of the young with sound doctrine. Whatever may be his calling, endeavoring to fulfill it to the great Taskmaster’s satisfaction, as if He should suddenly break in upon the work and look at it there and then, and judge His servant by it. This is the way to live.

47. *Verily I say unto you, That he shall make him ruler over all his goods.*

There are rewards for faithful service—not of debt, but of grace—not according to the law, but according to the discipline of the house of God. Oh, that we may be such faithful servants that our Lord may make us rulers over all that He has!

48-51. *But and if that evil servant shall say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to smite his fellowservants, and to eat and drink with the drunken; the lord of that servant shall come in a day when he looketh not for him, and in an hour that he is not aware of, and shall cut him asunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

He was a servant, you see. So this is a warning, not to the outside world, but to you who are inside the nominal church and who profess to be servants of God. And it is especially a warning to those of us who are ministers of the Gospel. Oh, that we may never begin to smite our fellow servants! Of course, we shall not do it with our fists, but we may do it with our tongue.

And may we never be numbered with those who are living for the delights of the flesh! If so, see what must come to us.

Our Lord still continued to speak upon the same subject of watchfulness by delivering the very striking parable of the wise and foolish virgins.

Matthew 25:1-4. *Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps.*

There did not seem to be much difference between them. They were all virgins, they all carried lamps, their lamps were all lit. And peradventure, the lamps of the foolish were quite as bright as those of the wise. The difference was unobservable to most onlookers, but it was an essential and fatal difference.

Ah! dear friends, it is the lack of oil that is the ruin of many a professor's lamp. Men have a name to live, but they have not the true life which is the evidence of the effectual working of the grace of God within their souls. They make a profession of religion, but they have not the secret grace to keep it up. There is a glitter and flash, but there is no permanency—and there cannot be any unless the Spirit of God be in us indeed, and of a truth. We may make a fair show in the flesh for a while, but what will be the end of it. This is the all-important question—Can we hold on and hold out? Certainly not without that heavenly oil which only the Spirit of God can supply.

5. *While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept.*

Oh, how sadly true it is that, sometimes, true saints as well as mere professors slumber and sleep! Even those who have the oil of grace are not always wide awake to serve their Master and to proclaim the Gospel as they should. There are, alas! sleeping believers and sleeping hypocrites side by side.

6-7. *And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps.*

They were suddenly awakened, and they leaped to their feet,—

*“Rising up at the midnight cry,
‘Behold the heavenly Bridegroom nigh.’”*

They all trimmed their lamps. That was the first thing for them to do—to look to their torches and have them ready. They could not meet the Bridegroom in the dark. They must each have a light, so they began their lamp-trimming. It is a pity to have to trim your lamp at the last. O dear friends, it is hard work, upon a dying bed, to have to be looking to one's lamp! You want your evidences to be bright there—your faith to be firm and all your graces brilliant. There must be no doubts and questions there, else they make a dying bed feel hard as granite to the head. May we, none of us, have at last to trim our lamps!

Those virgins who had oil in their vessels were able to trim their lamps and though the work was done hurriedly, it was done, and they were able to take their places in the bridal procession.

8. *And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.*

The modern rendering of this request is, “Send for the minister and ask him to pray for us, for our lamps are gone out.” Take heed, I pray you—you who are bold professors now—lest you should have to say at the last, “Our lamps are gone out.” It was too late for trimming and lighting then.

9-10. *But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came;*

There are deathbed repentances, undoubtedly, but I fear that, in the great majority of cases, people who wake up so late will find that, while they go to buy, the Bridegroom will come and there will not be, after all, the time in which to find the Savior. The mental capacity with which to think of Him may fail. The poor head may be so distracted with pain that it may not be able to catch the meaning of what faith in Christ is, or how it can be exercised. And so, the lamp will have gone out, and it will be too late to buy the oil which alone can make it burn. “While they went to buy, the bridegroom came;”

10-11. *And they that were ready went in with him to the marriage; and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us.*

“Open the door at least to us, for we came to meet you, and we carried lamps, and we were with the other virgins. ‘Lord, Lord, open to us.’” You know, perhaps, those striking lines which describe the foolish virgins’ request and the Bridegroom’s response to it,—

*“Late, late, so late; and dark the night, and chill!
Late, late, so late; but we may enter still.’
‘Too late! Too late! Ye cannot enter now.’”*

12. *But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not.*

When that door is once shut, it will never again be opened. All Scripture goes to prove that. There are some who foolishly dream about an opening of that door, after death, for men who have died impenitent—but there is nothing in Scripture to warrant us in having any such expectation. The final answer of the Bridegroom to these foolish virgins is, “Verily I say unto you, I know you not.”

13. *Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.*

That is, we do not know when it will be. Some have foolishly said, “We do not know the day, or the hour of Christ’s coming, but we may find out the year.” We shall not do anything of the kind—the time is hidden altogether. It is not revealed to us and it shall not be known till, suddenly, the Lord Himself shall come in the clouds, with His bright heavenly retinue, to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe.

Wherefore be always on the watch, beloved, “for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.” God help us to be ready for His appearing at any moment, for His dear name’s sake! Amen.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.